

Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Message from President Robert A. Alost

The International Training Conference on Historic Transportation Corridors was a resounding success because of the expertise of the individuals on the program and the participation in the conference by numerous historians, preservationists, cultural resource management professionals, and others who are interested in various aspects of cultural landscapes.

It was also a significant moment in the history of Northwestern State University, because the conference was the first activity at NSU related to the designation of the campus as the site for the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

Northwestern will become a focal point for historic preservation conferences and training sessions when the center is established on the campus during this academic year, and the meeting on historic transportation corridors served as a meaningful introduction for NSU into the realm of national and international preservation endeavors.

Participants in the International Training Conference on Historic Transportation Corridors were obviously impressed with the rich history of Northwestern, Natchitoches, and the Cane River region in which the university and community are located.

Natchitoches, which was established four years before New Orleans was founded, is the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase Territory. Northwestern was established in 1884, and the campus is a blend of the charm and character of NSU's 19th century beginnings and the modern facilities that reflect the school's unprecedented growth and progress in recent years.

Northwestern's historic significance is enhanced by its location near El Camino Real, which was the major East-West corridor for Native Americans and early explorers and settlers in the South and Southwest. The corridor, which runs from Natchitoches to Mexico City, was for years the major link between Spanish territories in the Southwest and settlements to the East.

The Historic Transportation Corridors Conference was a major step in the identification, evaluation, protection, and preservation of such historic corridors as El Camino Real and associated sites that make up the nation's important cultural landscapes.

Historic preservation has long been a compelling priority in Natchitoches and at Northwestern. Downtown Natchitoches has been designated as one of only two National Historic Landmark Districts in Louisiana. The

other is the French Quarter in New Orleans. The "Normal Hill" area of the NSU campus has also been designated as a National Historic Site.

In addition, the picturesque Cane River Country of Natchitoches Parish that includes historic plantation homes and many of the diverse cultures that have been intertwined to make the region one of the most unique in the nation is being considered for national park status.

Those diverse cultures are reflected in the architecture, customs, cuisine, music, and other structures, sites, and ways of life that make Natchitoches Parish a living laboratory for historians and participants in such programs as the Historic Transportation Corridors Conference.

That conference helped lay the groundwork for the ambitious programs that will be established at the university through the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. Funding is forthcoming for the restoration of a historic old gymnasium on the campus as the site for the center, which will be at the cutting edge of national efforts to identify, evaluate, and preserve our cherished prehistoric and historic resources.

The papers presented at the Historic Transportation Corridors Conference were informative and provocative, and organizations and individuals who are interested and involved in efforts to preserve historic corridors and other cultural landscapes will appreciate the materials that are being published in this issue of *CRM*.

All of us at Northwestern were proud that the university was selected as the site for the Historic Transportation Corridors Conference, and we look forward to the university's participation in future historic preservation projects and programs.

As the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training takes shape on the campus, we invite you to visit NSU and Natchitoches to share with us your experience and expertise in preservation matters and to visit the sites and structures that have brought this region to the forefront in national historic preservation activities.

